

THE AUSTRALIAN
NATIONAL
UNIVERSITY

INSTITUTE OF THE ARTS



Canberra School of Art
Graduate Diploma of Art
12-2-1993

Christopher Caines

Report
Presented in fulfillment of the requirements of the
Graduate Diploma of Art.

Summary

The History of Luminous Motion is a fifteen minute video/sound work designed for single channel display. It explores concepts of colonial history through archival collage and computer animated landscape models of territory traversed by fabled colonial explorers. Along the way invoking the development of new communication technologies as the search for the post colonial inland sea.

Contents

Summary

Introduction
Background

Text
Sound
Image

Acknowledgments
Footnotes
Initial proposal

Introduction

"...some of the finest meadows in the world..." - Captain James Cook.¹

"The words which are quoted may be found in Mr Cook's first voyage, and form part of his description of Botany Bay. It has often fallen to my lot to traverse these fabled plains; and many a bitter execration have I heard poured on those travellers, who could so faithlessly relate what they saw."

- Watkins Tench, First Fleet chronichler.²

The year of study that has culminated in the production of *The History Of Luminous Motion* has been richer in the absorption of new techniques and paradigms than any of my years practising as an artist, either inside art institutions or out.

The sheer bulk of information covered both in research and experimentation in this past year staggers me to contemplate. The amount of files saved, tapes filled, words written and nights spent gazing at screens are legion. The numbers of new computer software and hardware items learnt would alone exhaust the fingers and toes of an average family in the counting.

The fruits of these endeavours that did not make it to the final tape are included on VHS with this document (video, text).

One by product of all this industrious activity is that the sprawling manifesto of intent I submitted as my work proposal (included) has been entirely transformed. That this is necessary and natural is obvious, that the result of this process has been a work condensed and strengthened by the journey is what this report will attempt to illustrate.

"I do not recall whether I read or dreamt that Marcel Duchamp had said that some artists continue painting because they are addicted to the smell of turpentine. Their activity is therefore not aesthetic, but is instead a biological dependency on the chemistry of that medium.

Wall to wall air conditioning, the hum of decks at high speed rewinding, dim lights, corporate paradise, the electrons shot to flash against the phosphorescent screen.....That is my turpentine! "

- Juan Downey.³

Background -

The History Of Luminous Motion has had a lengthy gestation. Perhaps this period can be divided into five chapters.

1 - The Father of Lies.

I recall in Ancient History class in High School being first introduced to the ancient Greek historian Herodotus. Pilloried and lauded for his economy with the truth, in later years I discovered the huge body of literature concerning what to believe and what not to in his writings. The obvious parallels between this and the *unreliable narrator* of post modernist fiction struck me strongly. What began to occur to me after that was how applicable he was as a figure to think about the fabulist tendencies of colonial Australian history. This idea grew stronger when considered in relation to another major thread in Australian history, landscape.

2 - Airsick in a light plane

In January 92 I flew to Warburton, a remote aboriginal community in the western desert region. I went to begin shooting footage and collecting soundscapes for the project. While there apart from garnering hours of good footage I gained an instructive entree into aboriginal culture which has doubtless affected the project at the level of landscape and meaning.

3 - Mount Fractal

My research in early 92 led me to see that most of the exploration of the country was built on a utopian vision of how the country *should* look. This seemed very close to the utopian rhetoric I was used to hearing in the promotion of computer graphics and other visual technologies, stretching back through cinema via radio to photography. How we *should* be seeing the world. To illustrate these parallels I took to modelling the landscapes I wanted to explore with fractal landforms based on mapping data of the regions. Months were spent creating animated sequences in this fashion.

4 - A wave is a mountain in motion

Colonising this landscape daily is a backwash confusion of broadcast waves, radio, TV, phones. This is what I became concentrated upon in the production of the soundtrack. This and an electronic abstraction of the natural soundscapes I already had kept me in the sound studio experimenting for three months.

5 - Lost in the archive

In bringing all these elements together it was my concern to layer the surface of the work with a patina of the archival rising and falling with the sombre rhythm of the rolling landscape. The National Library was a godsend here, giving me access to the original journals and photographs of the explorers as well as the reams of commentary these generated.

Sound Track

The initial sound work for this project was done on location in the Blue Mountains and the Western Desert. Soundscapes were recorded there for mixing and treating in the studio. As the development of the work continued the natural sounds of insects, wind, water, etc came to be simulated electronically. And so become a map of the territory they were derived from. Apart from the medium itself the soundtrack comes to be the main signifier of the technological in the work. Primarily this is through the use of radio sounds that invoke the invisible terrain that passes through our bodies daily. Structurally and melodically the soundtrack is arranged along a recurrent sine wave pattern that echoes the shape of the land.

Text Track

n
Umb a
stree
t's wint'r

y ugli
nes
sC
omprises - e.e cummings. 4

Text on video has to take into account the fact that unlike life on the page, it is in motion. So, like speech it has to submit to a dynamic fracturing of syntax to express itself in time. To this end, I've taken to structuring the writing on two different schools of literature. Firstly the concrete poetry movement begun in dada later flowering in the work of e.e cummings. And secondly the nouveau roman school of novelists begun in France in the 1950's and finding it's best expression in the work of Claude Simon.

"Finally only one car, the doorhandles of which are decorated with bows of rainsoaked tulle, remains parked against the opposite curb, a little farther up the street from the movie theatre whose outside lights go out as the ushers draw the iron grille and the last spectators walk off in little groups, the corners of their coats turned up, hunching over in the wind, along the sidewalk's that are soon deserted." Claude Simon. "Triptych". 5

Image Track

In Raymond Bellour's now famous essay on literature in the electronic arts, he likens video to writing more than to cinema.

Video forces us to project into an uncertain future the oldest forms of expression linked to the human hand, the lines of drawing and of the letter. In this case however writing has the advantage over painting and drawing in the sense that its register is larger, that language has a hold on everything, and can speak of any of the other arts without being necessarily in dominance over them.

I have tried to use the writing in the image track (as opposed to that in the text track) as an abstracted image to be read only as a signifier of writing and not as text to be read. That the majority of this handwriting is from the journals of Eyre and Warburton has led me in two directions in thinking about its representation.

Firstly there is the dizzy layering of writing onto itself and onto other picture elements as an opaque landscape of language. While secondly there is the focus on calligraphy and the shape of lettering as image, much in the style concrete poetry and the decorative style employed in mosques.

"Having rented an apartment in order to write, he finds himself far from home, alone, and wonders only that much more who he is. He brings together signs, every possible sign (only a few of them as proof) of his fleeing identity: images (mainly photos, numerous polaroids pinned up onto the wall, but also a grab bag of what he sees in his home and outside), words (poems, newspaper clippings, pages from reference books). Images that can be reduced to a few words, and words framed like images."

- Raymond Bellour 6

Acknowledgments -

David Worral and my supervisor Stuart Ramsden have both been invaluable in enabling the work through conscientiously shielding me from anxiety producing influences.

Endnotes -

- 1 - Banks, Sir J., *The Endeavour Journal 1768-1771*, ed J.C Beaglehole, Sydney 1962, Vol. 2, pg. 63.
- 2 - Tench, W., *A Narrative of the Expedition to Botany Bay*, Sydney 1961, pg 38.
- 3 - Downey, Juan., *Illuminating Video, an essential guide to video art*, 1990, New York, chapter 3, pg 343.
- 4 - cummings, e.e., *73 Poems*, 1964, London, pg 17.
- 5 - Simon, Claude., *Triptych*, 1977, London, pg 171.
- 6 - Bellour, Raymond., *Illuminating Video, an essential guide to video art*, 1990, New York, chapter 4, pg 512.

Bibliography -

- The History of the World in 10 1/2 chapters. - Julian Barnes
- Perfume. Patrick Suskind.
- Isobars. Janette Turner Hospital.
- The Remains of the Day - Kazou Ishiguro.
- The Artist of the Floating World -Kazou Ishiguro.
- The Road to Botany Bay. - Paul Carter
- Triptych. - Claude Simon.
- Jealousy. - Claude Simon.
- The Golden Triangle. - Claude Simon.
- The Hard Boiled Wonderland and The End of TheWorld. - Haruki Murakami.
- Journals from the Antipodes. - John Eyre.

Discography -

- It takes a nation of millions to hold us back. - Public Enemy.
- Mishima, the soundtrack. - Phillip Glass.
- Trains. - Terry Riley.
- Emotional Hooligan. - Gary Clail.

Filmography -

- Dracula, Dir Francis Coppola.
- TV Dante, Dir Peter Greenaway.

Curriculum Vitae -

Christopher Caines,
Born Sydney, 1965.

Education -

Bachelor of Creative Arts in creative writing and media studies -
University of Wollongong, 1985-7.

Graduate Diploma in Computer Animation - Aust Centre for Art
and Technology / Aust National University, 1992.

Employment -

1992 -

P/T lecturer in computer animation, video, and sound production,
designing and teaching a course in multimedia (see attached
brochure), Aust Centre for Art and Technology / Aust National
University.

1989 -91

P/T teaching in media and media production with NSW TAFE and
the NSW College of Fine Arts.

Freelance video production, camera, sound, editing, computer
effects, music composition on numerous video art and corporate
video works. Clients include IBM and the Aust Tax Office.

Freelance computer/slide/video presentation work, lectures,
seminars and conferences. Clients include Staging Connections
and Eurovision.

1988 -

Co-coordinator and curator of Street Level artist run
contemporary art space, funded by the Visual Arts and Craft
Board of the Australia Council

Grants and Prizes -

Awarded travel grant from the ACT Cultural Council to attend Siggraph 1992, in Chicago USA.

Awarded professional development grant by the Visual Arts and Crafts board for production of a video installation work, 1991.

Awarded a New Image Research grant by the Australian Film Commission for the production of a computer animated video art work 1991.

Awarded a Pat Corrigan grant with David Haines, John Conomos and Tess Knight for the exhibition *Surrender* from the National Association of Visual Artists, 1990.

Awarded with Lalleen Jayamanne a New Image Research grant from the Australian Film Commission for the video art work *Row your Boat*, 1990.

Awarded with David Haines a New Image Research grant from the Australian Film Commission for the production of the video art work *Museum of Fire*, 1989.

Awarded first prize in the experimental section of the First Student Video festival, 1986.

Exhibitions and Screenings -

1993-

Museum Of Fire screenings,
Experimental Art Centre, Zurich.
1992 -

Museum Of Fire screenings,
Berlin Film and Video Festival.
Touring with selected works from that festival to Italy and South America.
Video Visions Festival, Glasgow.
Experimenta, Melbourne.

Row Your Boat screenings,
Frames Film and Video festival, Adelaide.
Experimenta, Melbourne.

1991 -

Museum Of Fire screenings,
Australian Video Festival, Sydney.
Australian Centre For Photography, Sydney.
Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane. (installation).

Row Your Boat screenings,
Dissonance Exhibition, Sydney.(installation).
Murdoch University Gallery, Perth.

1990 -

Surrender (installation component, video).
First Draft West, Sydney.
Holwood Arts Festival, Sydney.
Street Level Gallery, Sydney.
Tokyo Video Festival, Tokyo.
Self Portrait (installation, video).
Works Gallery, Sydney.

1989 -

Passion and Desire (video,photography).
Curator/Exhibitor.
Lewers Bequest Penrith Regional Gallery.
West (installation,photography).
M squared gallery.

1988 -

New Video
Street Level Gallery, Sydney.

1987 -

Gravity (performance) First Draft Gallery, Sydney.
Graduating Exhibition (video -*Untitled*)Long Gallery,
Wollongong.

Christopher Caines
1 Hardman St O'Connor 2601
(w) 06-2495640
(h) 06-2574640
(fax) 06-2470229

Study Proposal
Graduate Diploma Studio Practice 1992
Christopher Caines

The History of Luminous Motion is primarily about the notion of frontier. Frontier expressed in terms of exploration of landscape, actual and virtual landscapes. It examines the conceptual resonance between the colonial exploration of the Australian landscape and the exploration of the territory of 3D virtual space. Both of these landscapes fulfill for the explorer one of the central tenets of the frontier, that the landscape before them be one that contains no history. Terra Nulla. That it be an empty landscape, pure uncharted, unsullied and thus holding the potential of transforming the explorer.

Aims and Objectives -

The central objective of my study proposal is to produce and exhibit a major video work.

This objective encapsulates the experience of technical and conceptual development that will accompany the production of the work in a focused interdisciplinary environment.

=====

The video is a computer animated landscape piece entitled the History of Luminous Motion. The piece uses movement through simulated virtual representations of the landscapes traversed by early white explorers in this country (Blue Mountains, Western Desert, etc) as a metaphor for the post colonial information landscape and the utopian, frontier mentality parallels between those explorations and the breathless expansions in visual technologies that have so colonised the perceptual framework of this century.

The landscapes are to be modelled in two ways.

Firstly digital elevation mapping data is to be sourced from the CSIRO geoscience centre and used to render real world landscapes such as the Blue Mountains and the Western Desert. Secondly the landscapes will be chosen at random and rendered directly from a fractal base number. These landscapes will then be manipulated to contain oceans, hills and flora in the desirable proportions. The work makes use of extensive text sequences superimposed over the virtual scenery (alongside colonial archival material, texture mapped onto compugraphic objects). The text will be made of glass.

The words will form abstract referential narratives that stylistically have much in common with the "camera's eye" literature of the nouveau roman school of novelists (Robbe - Grillet, Simon) as well as the more traditional avantgardists, Barthelme and Burroughs. These narratives will also draw heavily on the speculative utopian writing common at the birth of new visual technologies, Walter Benjamin on photography, Andre Bazin on cinema, Gene Youngblood on video and the many who have set to dreaming over the new inland sea, virtual reality.

Image -

The image track will be entirely computer generated or computer processed, it will be composed of a lush amalgam of different processing and generating techniques, 24, 12 and 8 bit colour and resolution ranges will be composited together. Much of the image track will be sculpted in a 3D environment and texture mapped with additional footage to give the work a choreographed visual density that will allow for a greater conceptual complexity within a more highly resolved image space. This complexity is comprised of three levels. The bed will be landscape. The next strata will be the most various, composed of compressed sequences of remapped video, anim mapped 3D objects and luma washes. The top soil is words rendered into glass.

Sound -

The predominant source for the sound to be used in the work is environmental soundscapes recorded in the areas that are to be rendered from geographical data. These sounds are then sampled and manipulated before being sequenced in a MIDI environment. The other source for sound material is synthetic sound programmed into SY55, Dx7 and wavestation keyboards. The environmental soundscapes will form the bed as an analogue to the virtual landscapes on the image track forming their aural equivalent. All these sounds will be mixed onto eight tracks then taken individually to Sound Designer and edited and EQed as hard disk files. These tracks are then returned to analogue and remastered to Sound Designer for SMPTE locking to the video along with the midi instruments.

Resources -

The prime resource for the project is Amiga computing. This is for digitizing the video, rendering the landscapes, compiling the anims, manipulating some of the samples and midi sequencing. Secondly a single frame video controller and a controllable broadcast edit deck. Thirdly a Fairlight CVI for cut and paste overlays and luma washes. Fourthly a eight track studio equipped with MIDI controllable sampling gear, hard disk editing and recording facilities and SMPTE compatible mastering arrangement. Fifth a broadcast A/B suite with a luma key desk. And last but in no way least the technical and conceptual advice of ACAT and CSA staff.

Budget -

Sound -

Wavestation sound card-	\$250-
DAT tapes x 3 -	\$ 90 -
Open reel tape stock -	\$ 150-
Sound effect CDs -	\$ 150 -
Bars + Pipes midi Software -	\$ 400-
SY 55 Synthesizer -	\$ 1800-
Audition 4 sampling software -	\$ 250-
Audio Engineer Sampling software -	\$ 400-
Boss digital reverb -	\$ 250-
Cassette tapesx5-	\$ 50-

Image -

Pageflipper software -	\$ 250-
Pixmate software -	\$ 180-
Scenery Animator software -	\$ 170-
Spectracolour software -	\$ 300-
Camera,lights,action software-	\$150-
U-matic SP tape stockx10-	\$320-
SVHS tape stockx5-	\$150-
Video 8 tape stockx3-	\$75-
Betacam tape stockx5-	\$250-
A/B video editing at the Instructional Resources Unit 5 days-	\$750-
Fairlight CVI -	\$4500-
U-matic video deck-	\$300-

Miscellaneous -

Airfares to locations-	\$500-
petrol to locations -	\$ 500-
floppy disks -	\$ 250-

Total - **\$11985-**